Letter from Taizé
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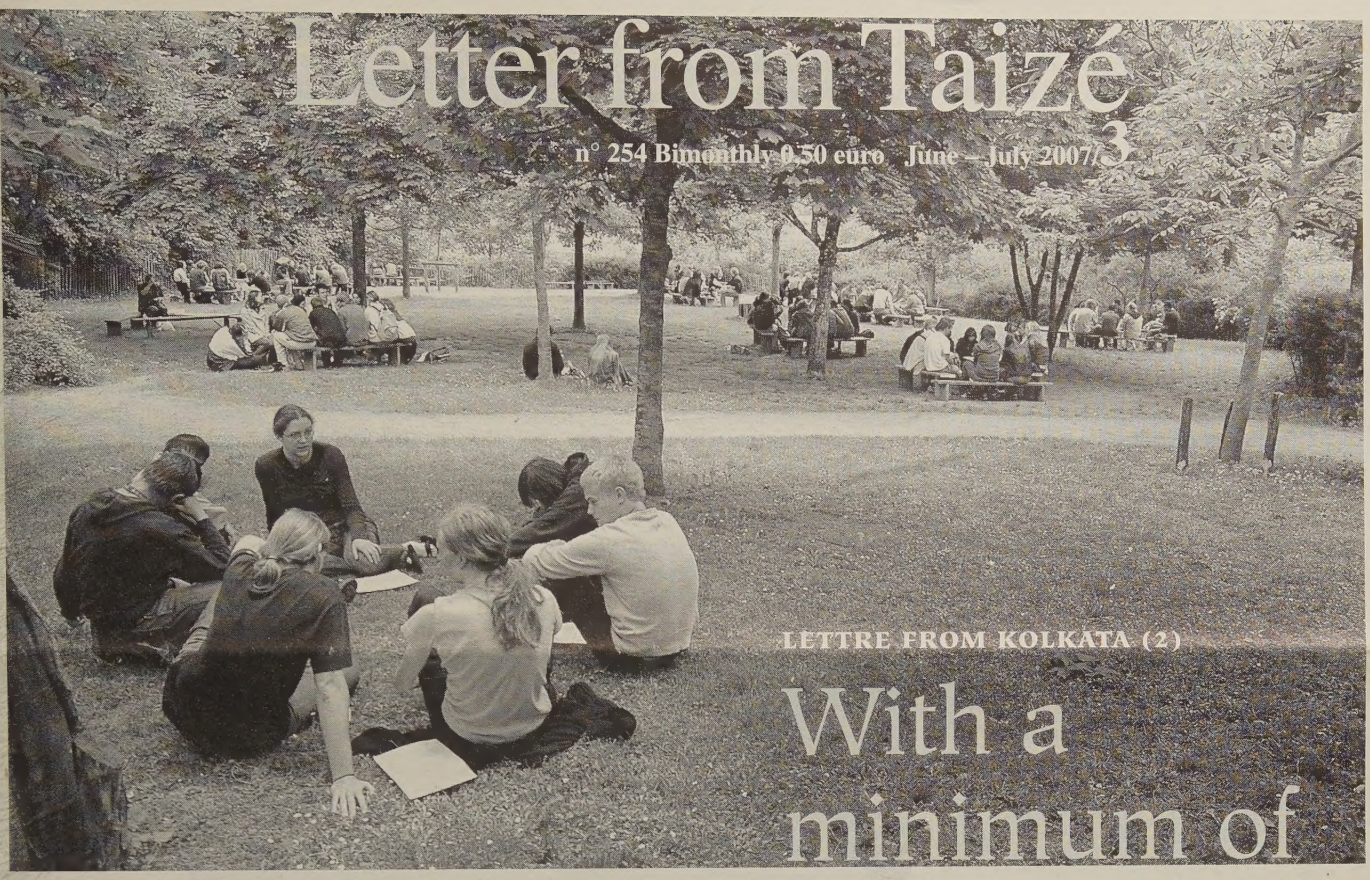

LETTRE FROM KOLKATA (2)

With a minimum of resources, God makes us creators with him

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Throughout the year 2007, the *Letter from Taizé* will continue the reflection begun by Brother Alois in his *Letter from Kolkata*.

The first pages will treat each part of the *Letter from Kolkata* successively, starting from three questions:

What experiences of Church does this part of the Letter reflect?

How was it put into practice during the meetings in Taizé or during recent stages of the pilgrimage of trust?

What inspiration does it offer for the future?

On page 8, the portrait of a witness to faith mentioned in the *Letter from Kolkata* enables us to go further with an inner search.

So many young people across the world are ready to make the unity of the human family more visible. They let themselves be challenged by a question: how can we resist all forms of violence and discrimination; how can we go beyond walls of hatred or indifference?

Part of South-Eastern Europe – Greece for some time, Bulgaria and Romania quite recently – now belongs to the European Union. Other countries in the region are still in a difficult or unstable situation. Wounds from the recent conflicts can still be felt. Following the meeting in Zagreb, a brother set off on a small pilgrimage of trust, visiting young people in Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. He writes:

"In Serbia, the most touching thing of all was to listen to the accounts of the young people who had been to Zagreb. They all were enthusiastic about the welcome the Croatian families had given them. Some had gone with a certain apprehension, sometimes they had had to overcome the reticence of their parents. After all that had happened these last years, they were not sure they would be welcome. But in fact each time they had the beautiful surprise of a true meeting of people with people, beyond stereotypes and prejudices. The Serbian young people were so happy to be taken into the families' homes, with so much consideration. On the first day, some of the Croatian hosts even telephoned the parents of their young Serb guests to reassure them; and then they continued each day, through friendship, just for the pleasure of exchanging a few words..."

The huge problems of our societies can foster defeatism. By choosing to love, we discover a space of freedom to create a future for ourselves and for those entrusted to us.

More than one thousand young adults from throughout Canada and the United States took part in a meeting in Montreal led by the Taizé Community with the theme "Leaving discouragement behind; finding new hope." They met from April 27-29 for three days of reflection and prayer, welcomed by several parishes of the city. Paul is a young doctoral student in philosophy at the University of Montreal. Thinking about the theme of the Montreal meeting, he wrote a text entitled "Discouragement or defeatism?" Here is an excerpt:

"I often hear that Christians are gentle immature dreamers, ignoring the tough rules of reality. When I open the Bible, however, I read about people in upheaval, a far cry from being kindly saved through the events that they go through physically and morally. I discover the journeys of men and women who are undergoing trials and who are often discouraged. From beginning to end, a God is with them spending much time to give them encouragement.

"God asks us in effect not to be discouraged. Despite the difficulties that are encountered, he promises us his faithfulness and his presence and tells us this over and over. He does not deceive us by saying, 'You will never meet any more obstacles.' Jesus himself did not come and propose to his contemporaries a softened version of life and of the struggles that it includes. Courage can not exist without realism. Christ bears witness through his life of constant confrontation with trials. He himself is sometimes discouraged, to the point of believing himself abandoned by his Father on the cross. But he never gave way to defeatism. (...)

"Of course often we do not know exactly how to live with certain difficulties that we encounter. We feel disoriented and lost. But God tells us, 'keep going forward; do not accept defeat'. Do not let yourself be 'un-done'. Could this be the simple but terrible meaning of defeatism? To resign oneself and finally to accept submitting to that which destroys us, which cuts us off from Life. There is a French play on words here, because to un-do yourself (*se défaire*) signified in older French to take one's life... We often pray to God, with reason, to give us courage to continue. He asks us to believe in the Life that he has placed and continues to place in us. He asks us to discover that we are true co-creators of ourselves. He asks us to leave behind discouragement that slows us down and prevents us from growing. Most especially, he asks us not to surrender ourselves to a defeatism that knocks us down, that puts us at odds with our own selves and that ends up destroying us."

With a minimum of resources, God makes us creators with him, even where circumstances are not favorable. Going towards others, sometimes with empty hands, listening, trying to understand... and already a deadlocked situation can be transformed. God awaits us in those who are poorer than we are.

In late February and early March, through Operation Hope, the community dispatched one thousand metric tons of wheat flour (40,000 25 kilo sacks) to North Korea, as humanitarian relief for people short of food. A brother of the community, himself originally from South Korea, accompanied the shipment and helped in the distribution to victims of last summer's flooding in the most stricken regions: Sinyang, Yangdok and Songchon, in South Pyongan Province. The flooding was the most devastating since the Korean War. People are still suffering from its effects. The food was distributed to the most vulnerable people: pregnant women, nursing mothers, small children and old people. This distribution ensured that over 10,000 families will have enough food to survive for two months this spring before the barley harvest. The transportation to the distribution-points ended on March 26.

In 1998 and 1999, the Community sent over a thousand tons of grain to North Korea, for the population suffering from several years of drought and flooding. Since then, each year it has been possible to express a sign of solidarity, by sending different kinds of humanitarian relief: milk and feeding bottles for new born babies, medical equipment and basic medicines. The Community has also invited four doctors from the Red Cross Hospital in North Korea for a year's training in France.

We all need to ask ourselves about our lifestyle. We need to simplify our lives. Inequalities sooner or later lead to violence. 20% of the world population, living in the most developed countries, uses 80% of the natural resources of our planet. A responsible management of the sources of energy and of drinking water is becoming more and more urgent.

In Taizé as in many other places, we are trying more and more to put into practice a responsible management of natural resources. This year, a brother is leading a workshop entitled "Habitat, transportation, consumption... what lifestyle can we adopt so as not to waste natural resources?" People reflect on things we can do in our daily lives, or more generally about a lifestyle that makes possible development of our societies for the benefit of all. In Taizé, in addition to reflecting, better insulation of the buildings, sorting and recycling rubbish, recovering rainwater, several solar heating panels on a sanitary unit, treating dirty water by a system of lagoons, as well as a community lifestyle are things that enable us to link theory with practice.

Some questions to continue reflecting, alone or with others, on the second part of the *Letter from Kolkata*:
- Going beyond walls of incomprehension: what enables us to undertake true communication where mistrust predominates?
- Leaving discouragement behind: how can we not let discouragement lead us systematically to defeatism? In what way is Christian hope not naïve?
- Simplifying our lives: what would I like to simplify in my lifestyle so that it is both less cluttered and more available and attentive to using natural resources well?

THE THIRD EDITION OF THE

"Bahia Tandem Tour"

For the third successive year, the Taizé brothers who live in Alagoinhas in Brazil organized a tandem bicycle race to call attention to the situation of disabled persons. On each tandem there were two young athletes: a deaf person in front, a blind person behind!

For a few minutes, masters of the road!

In the centre of Salvador. Friday afternoon. Intense traffic. But on the thirteen tandems, the twenty-some deaf and blind athletes are not even paying attention. Escorted by police motorcycles, they ride ahead, crossing red lights and going in the opposite direction from traffic. Hundreds of cars, buses and lorries stop to let the Tandem Tour pass.

The deaf see what is happening and enjoy the pleasure of being treated as kings, even for just a few minutes. And the blind? They also understand. They can hear that the traffic has stopped. They also hear the police motorcycles passing close by, in front of them and behind. And they especially realize that they do not have to stop; they can keep pedaling. This is a magnificent feeling of freedom for people who normally find it so difficult to get around in a large city where nothing is planned to help the blind orient themselves.

Five days, six towns, 200 km.

The third edition of the "Bahia Tandem Tour" starts from Alagoinhas. At the start, lots of people, including pupils from different schools. They all form a guard of honor, applauding the athletes and throwing confetti. 42 km. to go until Teodoro Sampaio. Next to the tandems, four bicycles for logistical support and in case of an emergency. Carlos, a mechanic, discreet, attentive and efficient. Ricardo, able to use sign language well and José Garcia and Madalena, two young volunteers from Spain and Germany. In front of the pack, a car with two Taizé brothers and Debora, the president of the *Fundação do Caminho*, organizers of the event. This *Fundação* has opened a school in Alagoinhas for handicapped children.

Teodoro Sampaio

Teodoro Sampaio is a small town in the interior, poor and isolated. A more than warm welcome; even the mayor is there! A good and plentiful dinner in a day-care centre. After pedaling 40 km. under a hot sun, the deaf and blind riders consume incredible amounts of food. Then, in the gym, local groups present themselves and then the pupils of the *Fundação do Caminho* school, disabled or not, who traveled by bus the whole day to present their orchestra of violins, flutes, keyboards and percussion instruments, as well as a mime theater prepared by deaf people.

A shortcut

Tuesday, from Teodoro Sampaio to Amelia Rodrigues. The planned itinerary is 39 km. long, all on asphalt. But at the starting-time, the vice-mayor insists that we take a route which is seven kilometers shorter. And, he adds, with a magnificent view. The district-dwellers tell us that that road of packed earth is full of holes and almost impassible. But the vice-mayor insists. How can we refuse after such a warm welcome? The pack takes the shortcut and quickly discovers what a mistake it is! The road is terrible. Flat tyres, burning sun... Two hours to travel 10 km. and find a paved road again. Everyone is exhausted. But the view was indeed magnificent!

Amelia Rodrigues

At Amelia Rodrigues, a good welcome in the municipal stadium. Performances prepared by groups of persons with disabilities, from Amelia Rodrigues or Alagoinhas. The mayor and several secretaries take part with great simplicity. In the evening, the mayor invites everybody to a pizzeria. For some, it's the first time they have ever eaten in a restaurant.

Feira de Santana

Wednesday, from Amelia Rodrigues to Feira de Santana. Together in the square in front of the town hall. Different groups and institutions who work with persons with disabilities present themselves. This is in fact the main reason for the Tandem Tour: to enhance the status of the handicapped, to create spaces where they can be seen, show their talents and defend their right to live and take part in the life of society.

All are impressed by this event out of the ordinary

Friday, the last day, 40 km. from Simões Filho to the centre of Salvador. During the whole route, three television crews follow. Since this leg of the race is long, the journalists amuse themselves by creating new situations: one journalist gets on one of the tandems to pedal a bit, another on one of the bicycles of the backup crew to do an interview while pedaling. The squad arrives at the expected time at the Padre Antonio Vieira School. The athletes pass between two rows of applauding pupils, then they head for the gym, happy to have faced the challenge of this long bicycle race. The school administration insists on the significance of such an event for their participation in society and gives all those who pedaled a beautiful medal.

All are grateful that the third Tandem Tour went off without any accidents and that it had such repercussions both regionally and nationally. And all wish that the cause of handicapped persons and their participation in school, professional and social life may be reinforced as a result.

BIBLE MEDITATIONS

Jesus Christ, Space of Freedom

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21 NRSV)

What intimidates us? What restrains our movement forward and curbs our freedom? What brings us to the point of calling it into doubt? It is useful to have these questions in mind while reading our passage and several other ones in the Letter to the Ephesians.

Those for whom this text was destined seem to believe that they are subject to the influence of forces beyond God's control. The prophets had experienced similar struggles when the people turned towards idols. In the Letter to the Ephesians, even if the cultural context is different (it has perhaps a matter here of believing in the power of the stars), the questions and the fears have not changed very much. In both cases people feel intimidated. The freedom to choose and to remain faithful to one's choice has been compromised.

This explains the author's insistence on the word "power". To an audience that seems to be worried, he affirms that God made use of an incomparable power in raising Christ from the dead. Nothing can resist it. There is no real power that could come from elsewhere, the origin of which would be outside him. All things are subject to him.

Still, the eyes of the heart have to be opened (1:18) to see "how extraordinarily great the power is which God has exercised for us" (1:19). The more believers contemplate this, the stronger their "inner self" becomes (3:16), in other words the ability to choose with intelligence and freedom. Here we are quite far from a religion of fear and superstition.

Knowing Christ and believing in him means evolving in a space of freedom. When the author speaks of "grasping the width, the length, the height and the depth" he does not specify what the object is that must be grasped. We have to read the following verse to find the expression "knowing the love of Christ" (3:19a). No doubt we are meant to understand that there is nothing greater than this mystery and we do not need to search anywhere else but in it.

- What plays on my fears and my worries today to make me doubt my freedom?
- What helps me discover the freedom that Christ gives?

Bringing Good News

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. (Mark 6:6b-13 NIV)

Jesus does not accomplish his mission alone. He gathers a group of friends to be with him and to announce the good news that the Kingdom of God is near. Like Jesus, who goes to teach in the surrounding villages, the disciples are sent out. But they cannot announce the gospel just through their words. They must also announce it by the way they live.

"Take nothing…except a staff." Jesus' instructions to the disciples are demanding. No bread, trusting that their needs will be met. No purse, which most beggars had in order to put alms. Not even a spare tunic, like those who are well off. The only thing that a disciple needs for the journey is whatever is indispensable to walk, a staff and sandals. Jesus invites his disciples to set out devoid of all types of security, placing their trust in God alone.

The message is offered to all. Jesus tells his disciples to "enter a house and stay there." At that time, Jewish travellers would normally stay in the home of another member of their community out of respect for God's law and fear of becoming impure. By accepting the hospitality of others, whoever they may be, the disciples are saying that the message goes beyond social and religious barriers.

However, the message it is not welcomed by everyone (see v. 11). In face of such resistance, what is important is not to be discouraged or detained. "Shake off the dust" and continue the journey.

The life of those who do welcome the gospel can be transformed. The disciples are given the same authority as Jesus: to heal the sick and cast out demons. What can healing the sick and casting out demons mean for us today? Perhaps it means liberating those who are imprisoned by sadness and discouragement, giving hope to those who think that their lives have no meaning. In order to do this we must trust and remain rooted in the essential.

- If Jesus sent out his disciples today, what instructions do you think he would give them?
- What gives you a sense of security?
- When have you had to go beyond your fears and set out with very little? What did you learn from this experience?
- What can healing the sick and casting out demons mean for us today?

These Bible meditations are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

JULY
DAILY READINGS

1 Lk 9:57-62
SUN Someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus answered, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

2 Is 6:1-8
Mon In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

3 Jn 20:24-29
Tue St THOMAS
Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied, "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

4 Mt 6:7-15
Wed Jesus said: Some think that by using many words in their prayer, they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

5 1 Co 12:12-30
Thu Paul writes: You are the body of Christ. Each one of you is a part of it.

6 1 Jn 1:8—2:2
Fri John writes: Jesus is the forgiveness for our sins, and not only for ours, but for those of the whole world.

7 1 P 2:4-10
Sat Peter writes: Once you were not a people at all, and now you are the people of God.

8 Lk 10:1-9
SUN Jesus sent out his disciples saying: Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say, "The kingdom of God is very near you."

9 Jr 17:14-17
Mon Heal me, Lord, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.

10 1 Jn 2:29—3:2
Tue John writes: You know that God is just. Then you must recognize that everyone who lives justly has been born of God.

11 Lk 10:21-22
Wed Jesus said: I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and clever, and revealing them to little children.

12 Is 59:15-21
Thu The Lord says: I have given you my Spirit. My words that I have put in your mouth will not leave you from now on and forever.

13 1 P 2:19-25
Fri Peter writes: There is merit in the sight of God if you put up with suffering you have not deserved. This is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps.

14 Jr 31:1-9
Sat The Lord says: I will guide them to streams of water by a level path where they will not stumble, for I am a father to my people.

15 Lk 10:25-37
SUN Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.

16 1 P 5:6-11
Mon Peter writes: Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you.

17 Zc 8:16-19
Tue The Lord says to his people: Within your gates render judgments that are true and make for peace. Yes, love truth and peace.

18 1 Th 2:1-12
Wed God has entrusted us with the Gospel, and so we preach, not trying to please people but God who knows our hearts.

19 Jn 12:35-36
Thu Jesus said to his disciples: Believe in the light so that you may become children of light.

20 1 P 2:19-25
Fri When Christ suffered, he made no threats but placed his trust in the One who judges justly. He bore our sins in his own body on the cross so that we might die to our sins and live for justice.

21 Col 2:1-5
Sat In Christ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

22 Lk 10:38-42
SUN Jesus said to Martha: Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.

23 Ws 1:1-3
Mon Seek God in simplicity of heart; for the Lord reveals himself to those who do not refuse him their trust.

24 Rm 8:31-39
Tue Who could condemn us? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God, interceding for us.

25 Mt 20:20-28
Wed St JAMES
Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world the powerful make their power felt. Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.

26 Ep 2:19-22
Thu You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

27 1 P 4:12-16
Fri In so far as you share in the suffering of Christ, be glad. When his glory is revealed, you also will be filled with joy and gladness.

28 Is 30:15-18
Sat The Lord says: Your salvation is in returning and rest, your strength lies in calm and trust.

29 Lk 11:9-13
SUN Jesus said: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

30 Jn 4:5-42
Mon Jesus said: Anyone who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give them will become a spring of water within them, welling up to eternal life.

31 Lk 6:27-35
Tue Jesus said: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Holy Spirit, breath of Christ's loving, our prayer may be quite humble, but through the Gospel we understand that you pray even in the silence of our hearts.

Jesus, hope of our hearts, you always live within us, and by your Gospel you say to each one of us, "Do not be afraid; I am with you."

AUGUST

DAILY READINGS

1 Ph 3:1-9
Wed Paul writes: In order that I may gain Christ I have accepted the loss of all other things.

2 Ps 46
Thu God is our refuge and strength, and an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be in turmoil.

3 1 Th 1:1-8
Fri Paul writes: You have imitated us and the Lord by welcoming the Word with the joy of the Holy Spirit despite severe suffering.

4 Ep 4:17-32
Sat Let yourselves be made new in the attitude of your minds and be clothed with the new self, which is created to be like God in justice and in holiness of the truth.

5 Lk 12:13-21
SUN Jesus said: Be on your guard against every kind of greed; for a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions.

6 2 Co 3:16-18
Mon TRANSFIGURATION Paul writes: All of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory.

7 Lk 6:46-49
Tue Jesus said: Whoever comes to me, listens to my words and acts on them is like someone building a house who digs down deep and lays the foundations on rock.

8 Si 35:12-14,16-18 (35:14-22)
Wed God is utterly impartial. God never shows partiality to the detriment of the poor, but listens to the prayer of the one who is wronged.

9 Jn 15:15-17
Thu Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because everything I have learnt from my Father I have made known to you.

10 Ep 2:13-18
Fri Christ is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between the peoples and reconciled them to God in one body through the cross.

11 Jn 15:9-17
Sat Jesus said: There is no greater love than to give one's life for those one loves.

12 Lk 12:32-48
SUN Jesus said: Be like people waiting for their master to return, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.

13 Ph 1:1-11
Mon Paul writes: I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.

14 Mt 6:25-34
Tue Jesus said: Do not worry about your life. Seek first God's kingdom and his saving justice and all other things will be given to you as well.

15 Lk 1:39-45
Wed THE VIRGIN MARY Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

16 1 Tm 4:12-16
Thu Paul writes to Timothy: You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you. Do not neglect it.

17 Ep 4:25-32
Fri Paul writes: Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

18 Mt 9:36—10:8
Sat Jesus sent out his twelve disciples, saying: Proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Freely you have received, freely give.

19 Lk 12:49-53
SUN Jesus said: I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already burning!

20 Mi 6:6-8
Mon This is what the Lord wants of you, only this: to act justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

21 Si 18:8-14
Tue Human compassion extends to neighbours, but God's compassion extends to everyone.

22 Mt 13:31-32
Wed Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which someone took and sowed in their field. Of all seeds it is the smallest, yet once it has grown it is the biggest of plants.

23 Si 30:21-25
Thu Trick the cares that weigh upon you, console your heart, chase sorrow far away, for sorrow is no use to anyone.

24 Ezk 36:24-27
Fri God says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

25 Mt 13:44-52
Sat Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like a trader looking for precious pearls, who on finding one of great value, goes, sells everything he has and buys it.

26 Lk 13:22-30
SUN Jesus said: People will come from east and west, from north and south, and sit down at the feast in the kingdom of God.

27 2 Co 3:16-18
Mon Paul writes: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

28 1 Jn 2:3-11
Tue Whoever loves their brother or sister lives in the light and need not be afraid of stumbling.

29 1 Co 13:8-13
Wed Paul writes: These three things remain: Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them is love.

30 Jm 1:22-25
Thu James writes: Do not only listen to the Word, put it into practice.

31 Rm 12:14-21
Fri Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing, weep with those who weep.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

If God is merciful, why does the Bible contain threats?

The Bible draws a portrait of a God who is Love and who wants human beings to have life in fullness. Although this conviction comes to us through Jesus Christ, it is already found throughout the Scriptures of Israel. The Bible begins with the story of creation, placing at center-stage a God who, far from keeping back what he has for himself, desires to share everything with other beings that he will call into existence. After this we find the heart of the faith of Israel, the epic of the God who liberates a group of slaves and makes them into his own people, called to be, by the quality of their life together, a sign of his presence and compassion in the midst of creation.

What is more, God never abandons his loving designs. When his people turn away from him, God keeps looking for ways to set them back on the right road. Always ready to forgive, and in this way different from human beings (see Isaiah 55:6-9), God shows himself to be "the God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, overflowing with loving-kindness and faithfulness" (Psalm 86:15).

But if God is described as "slow to anger," does that mean he can sometimes get angry? During Israel's journey through the wilderness, we read that, on several occasions, "God's anger flared up against his people" who were disobedient (Numbers 11:33; cf. 11:1; 12,9). Moreover, in the books of the prophets, we sometimes see these men of God rise up against the wrongdoings of the nation with vigor and even indignation. Today, in any case, it is hard for people to see how threats and anger can go hand in hand with a God of mercy and forgiveness.

We should not, however, see God's "anger" as diametrically opposed to his forgiveness, but rather as two sides of one and the same coin. The notion of "anger" or "wrath" is used to emphasize the fact that God's love cannot tolerate anything that hinders life or destroys it, in short what we call evil. If God truly loves, he cannot remain indifferent at seeing that love flouted, rejected, because in so doing he would have to resign himself to the fact that his intention to give us the fullness of life is not going to succeed.

When the Bible presents us with words that are apparently harsh, they should be interpreted as a cry from God's – or his spokesperson's – heart to emphasize the consequences of rejecting a love which is nonetheless always offered. Far from contradicting love, what is called "God's anger" is paradoxically an expression of that love, insofar as it is temporarily foiled by human freedom. But then the question arises: if God is Love, must not that love in the end overcome all the resistances to it? The true problem, then, is not to know whether there is anger in God, but how that anger can achieve its end, eliminating evil without doing violence to the freedom of the other.

Does the Gospel enable us to solve the dilemma of a love that is refused?

The biblical vision of God seems to set us before a dilemma: on the one hand all God can do is love, and on the other he cannot tolerate evil. To express it in the language of the Bible, divine love seems fated to split into two parts, mercy and anger, without one of them ever completely covering the other.

The experience of the prophets shows a way out of this dilemma. First of all Hosea, obliged to marry an unfaithful woman. Wounded by the infidelity of his wife, the prophets threatens her, but he quickly realizes that because of his love for her, in hurting her he would hurt himself just as much, or even more. He thus comes to realize that what human beings experience as divine anger is in fact only the outer face of God's own suffering at seeing his love rejected.

The prophet Jeremiah continues along these lines. Confronted with the refusal of the nation to listen to the warnings he is called to proclaim in God's name, Jeremiah is torn apart in his own flesh by the opposition between the two: "Let my eyes run with tears night and day, without ceasing, for the virgin daughter, my people, is wounded with a great wound" (14:17). He becomes, by the pain and sadness in his heart, the link between his compatriots and his God.

One more step, and we come to the mysterious figure of the Lord's Servant (Isaiah 53). Just like Jeremiah, this innocent individual, sent by God, takes upon himself the suffering that the guilty are unable to admit; but even more, by assuming that unacknowledged suffering he brings them healing. It is as if forgiveness can only reach its goal if it does not descend from on high but rather comes from below, if it is expressed by a solidarity lived out with the wrongdoers, that goes to the very end.

This evolution gives us the key to understanding the fate of Jesus: "Christ suffered for you (...) though he committed no evil. When abused, he did not abuse in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but entrusted himself to the One who judges justly. He himself bore our faults in his body on the cross so that, dead to our faults, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:21-24).

In Christ's gift of his life we thus glimpse what Saint John, in a magnificent shorthand expression, calls "the wrath of the Lamb" (Revelation 6:16). If "divine anger" is another name for the passion of a rejected love, then that love can achieve its aim only if it fully assumes the consequences of such a rejection. Anger must thus turn into solidarity in suffering, becoming indistinguishable from the utmost of mercy. Offering no resistance to evil, Christ swallows it up in an abyss of goodness. Death loses its sting (see 1 Corinthians 15:54-57) in order to become a road to Life.

A PORTRAIT:

Saint John Chrysostom (344 – 407): An Astonishing Modernity

The *Letter from Kolkata* quotes on page 3 a text from St. Jean Chrysostom that recalls the unbreakable link between the Eucharist and solidarity with the poorest:

"You wish to honour the body of the Saviour? The same one who said: This is my body also said: You saw I was hungry and you didn't give me to eat. What you did not do to one of the least, you refused to me! So honour Christ by sharing your possessions with the poor." (*Homily 50 on Matthew.*)

Who was this man who the Christian East called "Golden Mouth" because of his poetical gifts in expressing prayer? What aspects of his life are still an encouragement for us today?

John's life had three lines of force: an exceptional ability to explain the Good News of Christ with passion and in the language of the culture of his time; a strong emphasis on the social consequences of the Gospel; an effort to make worship beautiful and to transmit theological reflection in a poetic form.

John was born in Antioch, in modern Turkey, of an aristocratic family. Deeply influenced by his mother's faith, he studied Scripture under the direction of the teachers of the school of Antioch, who wished to translate the thought of the Bible into Greek categories without losing the original meaning.

As soon as he could he left his mother, who wanted to keep him close to her as a "monk at home," and went off into the hills to begin a life of solitary prayer completely apart from society. Then a crisis of conscience arose: was it necessary to flee the problems of society in order to remain pure and attached to the Gospel, or to go instead into the world to communicate the love of Christ, "the friend of humans," as he liked to repeat?

In the end he chose to return from his total separation from the world, going back to Antioch where he was ordained a priest in 386. He became famous for his ability to link the text of the Bible to the life and questions of ordinary people. At times he could speak for two hours without stopping, encouraged by the acclaim and the applause of his hearers. In response to the luxury and idleness of the rich, he emphasized the importance of holding things in common, of work, of the need to free slaves; he called for individual and collective sharing (he even came up with a plan to end poverty in Antioch). Solidarity, more than just the work of a good conscience, was for him a sacrament, a sign of Christ's real presence in our world. Often speaking about the words of Jesus: "What you have done for one of these little ones, you have done to me," he concluded that the poor person is "another Christ" and that the "sacrament of the altar" must be continued "in the street" by the "sacrament of the brother."

In spite of himself, John was chosen in 397, because of his talents as an orator, as archbishop of the capital of the Eastern Empire. In Constantinople, attentive to the people, he multiplied hospitals and centres of welcome, proclaimed the Good News in the countryside and even to the Goths who settled in the area.

He took very courageous political positions, opposing a minister who wanted to abolish the right of asylum, then later protecting him from a riot when, disgraced, he sought refuge in the basilica. He tried to make the higher clergy more humble and to remind the imperial court of the demands of the Gospel.

That was all too much for his enemies, who joined forces and had him exiled to Armenia in 404. He remained there for three years under house arrest. And yet his correspondence, his numerous visitors, including many from Antioch, worried the powers-that-be, who had him deported even further, to the shores of the Black Sea. He made the exhausting journey on foot. In Comana, utterly weary, he prepared to die, put on white garments, received communion, prayed for those around him and gave up his spirit saying, "Glory to God for all."

Some questions to let John's life echo in our own life:

– His vocation led him not always to satisfy the desires of his mother: must I too sometimes go against what other people expect of me?

– Concerning the "sacrament of the brother": what place do other people and their needs have in my life?

– He finally lived out his monastic commitment in the midst of society: what commitments do I have in society? What is the place of Christians today in the political life of a country? Is it sometimes necessary, in the name of faith in Christ, to resist the authorities or current fashions?

Taizé Day by Day

Brother Alois was received by **Pope Benedict XVI** in a private audience Monday morning March 26th. He thus continues a long-lasting tradition: from the beginning of the pontificate of John XXIII till the death of John Paul II, Brother Roger went to Rome every year to meet the pope. "I was able to tell him that in Taizé we wish to go to the sources of faith, towards Christ, and to do this within the concrete communion of Christians. It is the Christ of communion that fascinates us. Faith is a personal step, yet it is not an individualistic one; it is lived within the communion of the Church. The pope strongly encouraged me in this. He also spoke to me of his great esteem for Brother Roger and for what he did for ecumenism and for peace

Close to **10,000 people** came to Taizé in successive waves during the Easter weeks. There were 850 young Portuguese during Holy Week, a group of Chinese from Peking on pilgrimage, the visit of Archbishop Jordan of Reims, the presence of large diocesan groups from France, many young Catholics and Protestants from Germany, the visit of Bishop Malkhaz of the Baptist Church of Georgia, and young people from Asia, Africa and Latin America who are beginning to arrive.

Cardinal Tettamanzi, the archbishop of **Milan**, came with 100 young priests from his diocese for a day in Taizé, during a pilgrimage to Dijon in the steps of Elizabeth of the Trinity. They took part in the prayer and joined the community for their midday meal.

The meeting in **Stockholm** (May 3-6) was preceded by the presence of several brothers who spent three months in the city. That gave them, among other things, the possibility to deepen the bonds that have existed for many years between Taizé and the Lutheran Church in Sweden.

Letter from Taizé

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